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ABSTRACT

A case-study approach is presented to demonstrate how to use situational leadership (a management theory model developed by Hersey and Blanchard) to make students in teacher education programs more receptive to educational innovation in second language learning. Situational leadership theory defines a leader as anyone trying to influence another person, and it focuses on the behavior of leaders in classifying different styles of leadership. One focal point is how to change follower's readiness level so that they are prepared for a change in leadership style: students are delegated responsibilities in small increments (e.g., leading up to a 15-minute oral report). Seven case studies are described in which the approach is applied to: journal keeping by college freshmen; participatory communication in a Japanese high school; preparing students for English as a Second Language examination; composition vs. copying; using heuristics for prewriting; communicative language teaching; and teaching grammar. They illustrate that training in situational leadership offers teachers a concrete alternative tool in introducing new methodology. Contains 9 references. (LB)

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Situational Leadership and Innovation in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Teachers in traditionally-oriented educational systems who have been trained themselves in modern language-teaching methods may wish to try these new methods with their students, but hesitate to do so because they feel that students would be unwilling to try anything new. The problem is one of making educational innovation acceptable to students who may have a different perception of education and of appropriate classroom practice than that presupposed by the method to be introduced. Because of these difficulties, teachers sometimes simply continue to use only familiar methods. However, instead of using old methods out of fear that students would not accept new ones, teachers can employ situational leadership.

Situational leadership is a management theory, a model of leadership styles developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1982). In this theory, leadership styles are cross-classified along the two continua of task behavior and relationship behavior, and together these continua define four leadership styles. To Hersey and Blanchard, the appropriate mix of these two types of behavior, determining a particular leadership style, depends on the environment, which itself is composed of a host of variables including the leader's and followers' readiness levels, demands, attitudes, abilities, and expectations (of what is "appropriate" for classroom activities, for example). Here, a case-study approach is used to demonstrate how to use situational leadership to make students more receptive to educational innovation.

An important issue in second language teacher education is the extent to which it is worthwhile to have future teachers learn about modern or innovative methods of second language instruction when, as they frequently remind teacher educators, they may find it difficult or impossible to secure the permission from supervisors, approval from colleagues, and cooperation from students which would enable them to introduce and use new methods successfully. The problem is one of making educational innovation acceptable to people who may have a different perception of education and of appropriate classroom practice than that presupposed by the method to be introduced. Obviously, those of us who are teacher educators wish to have teachers learn about modern methods and techniques because we believe they are more effective than traditional ones. We expect teachers not only to learn about such methods and techniques, however, but to put them into practice--not just to continue using only traditional and familiar techniques. That is where the challenge is, and where there is a gap in most methodology instruction. Future teachers are taught new methods, but are rarely taught the change agent skills which might enable them to become successful innovators in their classrooms. The purpose of this demonstration is to try to help fill the gap with one set of techniques which has been developed to aid in the introduction of innovation--situational leadership. What we are going to do here is use a case-study approach to see how to use situational leadership to try to make students more receptive to educational innovation.

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

What is situational leadership? Hersey and Blanchard's (1982) situational leadership is a management theory, developed originally for use in business, which has been used by educational administrators to introduce change. It is not widely known among language teachers, so it is worthwhile to outline the theory here.

Situational leadership theory defines a leader as anyone trying to influence another person (e.g. a teacher trying to pry students loose from excessive memorization), and focuses on the behavior of leaders in classifying different styles of leadership (pp. 95-96). Leadership styles are cross-classified along the two continua of task (directive) behavior and relationship (supportive) behavior, and a third consideration, environment, is added to reflect the finding that a single type of behavior on the part of the leader is not necessarily going to work in influencing followers under all circumstances; in language teaching, environment could involve such factors as cultural traditions, availability of resources, students' learning styles, etc.

In any case, the two continua of task and relationship behavior logically define four leadership styles, as follows:

S1. High task/low relationship

(Also termed telling or directing; see Blanchard [1985])

S2. High task/high relationship

(Also termed selling or coaching)

S3. Low task/high relationship

(Also termed participating or supporting)

S4. Low task/low relationship

(Also termed delegating)

Task behavior is "the extent to which leaders are likely to organize and define the roles of the members of their group (followers); to explain what activities each is to do and when, where, and how tasks are to be accomplished" (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982, p. 96). It is concerned with seeing that activities are carried out, for example that students present assigned oral reports. Relationship behavior is "the extent to which leaders are likely to maintain personal relationships between themselves and members of their group (followers) by opening up channels of communication [and] providing socioemotional support" (p. 96). It is concerned with the social and psychological environment, for example that students enjoy class activities or at least perceive them favorably. As these two types of behavior are combined in different proportions, the four leadership styles are created.

To see how this works, consider a study by Hersey, Angelini, and Caracushansky, cited by Hersey and Blanchard (1982), which was carried out in Brazil. In the classroom, the four styles, S1 through S4, were interpreted as follows (p. 166):

S1. Straight in-class lecturing by the teacher, with no attempt to maintain a social or psychological relationship with students.

S2. Circular group discussion with the conversation still closely directed by the teacher.

S3. Group discussion with the teacher participating in a supportive way but not directing.

S4. Continued group discussion with the teacher only participating when asked.

As stated above, environment must be considered along with task and relationship behavior. The major environmental factor which Hersey and Blanchard consider is followers' readiness level (Hersey, 1984, p. 45), or their "ability and willingness...to take responsibility for their own behavior" (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982, p. 151) with regard to any particular task to be carried out; people do not have a single general readiness level, but rather a set of readiness levels, each corresponding to a different activity. For example, a student who is diligent about handing in assignments but works poorly in groups is ready with respect to homework but unready with respect to group work.

Like leader behavior, readiness also has two components. The first, job readiness, is the "knowledge, ability, and experience to perform certain tasks without direction from others" (p. 157). Psychological readiness involves "confidence and commitment," or, at least, "willingness...to do something" (p. 157). Persons who demonstrate low levels of both of these with regard to a particular activity (they're "unable and unwilling" [p. 154]) are said to have readiness level R1, while those with increasingly higher levels of one or both types of

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readiness are said to be at levels R2 through R4, respectively:

R1. Low job readiness, low psychological readiness.

R2. Low job readiness, higher psychological readiness (this is a stage of initial enthusiasm).

R3. High job readiness, lower psychological readiness (this is a stage of self-doubt).

R4. High job readiness, high psychological readiness.

The numbers given to these four readiness levels correspond to those given to the four leadership styles, S1 through S4, and the basic concept is that each leadership style is indeed most appropriate for use with followers who are at the corresponding readiness level. In S1, followers, who don't know anything about a task and are initially unenthusiastic, are told what to do. In S2, followers, who still don't know anything about the task but are beginning to express interest, are told what to do but also given socioemotional support to help persuade them. In S3, leaders and followers share decisions while socioemotional support is continued, and in S4, followers, who now have a high degree of readiness, can be left on their own to accomplish tasks (p. 153, p. 156).

Before attempting to apply it, it is necessary to take up one more point about situational leadership theory. There is more to it than simply fitting one's teaching style to students' readiness levels. Otherwise, a teaching strategy based on it would not be substantially different from the familiar and ultimately counter-productive approach of taking students who are, for example, at R1

with respect to presenting oral reports that have not been simply memorized (they don't know how and they are unwilling to try) and simply telling them to do it. They would be quite likely to memorize anyway. The goal of situational leadership is to advance--to gradually move followers from lower levels to R4 in order to make them able to function independently. Ideally, students should be carrying out activities in certain ways not because the teacher said so, but because they see it as rewarding or as compatible with personal goals (see, for example, pp. 109-110).

Much of situational leadership theory is concerned with how to change followers' readiness level so that they will be prepared for a change in leadership style. The suggested technique is to use a gradual, step-by-step approach, trying to advance in small increments. In other words, while students may not be able to "move directly from a system of education based on rote learning to a system of education where meaning and understanding are everything,...they can move there by stages" (Patrie & Daum, 1980, p. 393). The difference between readiness levels R2 and R3, for example, is one of task behavior; R2 followers don't know how to carry out a task while R3 followers do. Training them would involve repeatedly delegating responsibilities to them in small increments and rewarding successful performance (pp. 201-203). Students who have been persuaded by the teacher that they ought to speak extemporaneously, then, should not be assigned a 15-minute oral report all at once; the idea would be to

build up to it, at each step following the directions given by Blanchard (1985, p. 7): (a) let followers know what you want them to do, (b) model appropriate performance for them, (c) monitor their attempts to carry it out, and (d) give an appropriate response.

CASE STUDIES

Case 1

Description

You are teaching English composition to a class of college freshmen. You would like to have them keep journals. You plan to collect the journals every two or three weeks and read selected portions, commenting on them briefly, but you do not plan to correct individual entries--it would be contrary to your philosophy of composition, and anyway the class is too large. You know that your students have never kept journals in a composition class before, and they are used to having all their written work corrected. You are afraid that they will object to the idea of keeping journals and will regard your failure to make corrections as evidence of your ignorance of the language.

Explanation

Here, the main point to be made is that with respect to journal-keeping, students are at readiness level R1, and therefore, simply assigning that journals be kept and giving students the minimal supervision implied by infrequent collection and lack of any correction is likely to be ineffective. Students will indeed probably complain, and are likely to gradually cease doing the assignment.

The teacher might be best advised to provide closer supervision and direction: more frequent collection of journal entries (if this is too big a burden, the teacher can require students to write in their journals less frequently at first), and some compromise on the sure-to-be-troublesome correction issue. Perhaps the students could be satisfied by having some of their other, nonjournal writing corrected instead, at the same time, or some journal entries might be corrected indirectly by having the teacher use correct forms in a response to each (now less frequent) entry. There is nothing new about any of these compromises. They are frequently employed by practicing teachers. They need to be specifically pointed out to students, however, as means of making new methodology work.

Case 2

Description

An American teacher in a Japanese high school had difficulty in getting his students to participate in communicative activities. They simply would not speak voluntarily in class. His solution was to get the students to ask him questions about himself, questions that he could answer with either "Yes" or "No" to avoid taxing their powers of aural comprehension. Since they would not voluntarily communicate even to this limited extent, he asked them to stand up, and would not allow any student to sit down again until she had asked a question. Since the students did not wish to remain standing indefinitely, they now performed as the teacher required.

--based on Wiig, 1985.

Explanation

The students here appear to have been at readiness level R1 with respect to communication. It may seem that the teacher was using the appropriate S1 style, "telling," with them (after all, he "told" them to stand up and ask questions), but given that the desired behavior was communication, he really was not. It is doubtful that students intent on physical relief could have been paying much attention to the content of the language exchanged. The situation in fact probably closely resembled the one described by Hutchinson and Klepac for a class in Yugoslavia (1982, p. 142), where the language exchanged was viewed by students less as an opportunity for real communication than as a simple opportunity for the teacher to grade them. In our example, the teacher did not really instruct the students in communication at all. He did nothing to advance them from R1 to the R2 level which would make them willing to communicate on a subsequent occasion, nothing to persuade them of communication's value or to show them how it might be accomplished. It is not difficult to predict that if he lets students know ahead of time that he is planning to repeat this activity, some will plan to be absent.

Additional Case Studies[1]

Case 3

Older ESOL readers were full of comprehension questions and vocabulary exercises. The exams which typically went along with them also had comprehension questions and vocabulary items, so students could prepare by rereading

chapters and reviewing vocabulary. Now ESOL readers concentrate on skill development, and when students take exams, the exam questions are designed to test how well students have acquired skills such as skimming, guessing word meaning from context, and determining the relationship between ideas. This means that students cannot specifically study (i.e. cram) to prepare for them. Exam success is based on a long period of practice.

The students in my advanced reading class have expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction with this situation. Following the textbook and my instructions, they have practiced all the skills necessary to be successful readers in English. The final exam is in three weeks, and they should do reasonably well. However, the students are upset that on the exam they will be asked to read and answer questions about material they have never seen before (hence demonstrating their skill as readers). They have asked for a traditional exam with vocabulary and comprehension questions instead.

Case 4

A foreign teacher at a university in Cote d'Ivoire complained that her students spent too much time copying down instructions given to them orally or written on the blackboard instead of engaging in the communicative activities the instructions were for. She recognized that the students preferred copying activities because they were used to them--throughout their earlier educational experience correct and complete copying had been emphasized--but she was concerned that with only one hour

of class per week to prepare students for difficult year-end exams, too much time was being wasted. "I feel anxious when I consider what my students could be learning if only they would work more efficiently," she said. On one hand she recognized that the problem was, perhaps, hers rather than the students'--her own culture (perhaps too strongly) emphasized the value of time as a commodity. On the other hand, she knew that of the first-year students, approximately 50% would normally fail the year-end final, an exam of which they were very fearful.

--based on English, 1989.

Case 5[2]

Student was not at all receptive to this lesson [a lesson on using heuristics for prewriting]. I did not know that composition is causing the student so much anxiety that she has been skipping Eng. 184 [her writing class] and is several assignments behind. Therefore, as soon as I mentioned writing, she tried to change the subject. I tried mapping [a heuristic] first, but she would only orally explain, using long sentences, problems she has at her job. The topic was then changed, at the student's request, to one of her writing assignment topics, theft. In step three [practice with looping, another heuristic], the student refused to write continuously and became angry when I would not correct her spelling and grammar as she wrote. After less than one minute, she refused to continue the heuristic. I suggested that since she was generating ideas only and not a draft, she try writing in Polish words that she did not know in English. It did not help at all.

To my great relief, the student liked the "Kerrigan" method, and we were able to complete step four [practice with this heuristic]. However, there was no time for step five [practice with a heuristic of the student's choice]; it had become irrelevant anyway. The planned assignment was not given as she had too many class assignments. In the end, the student said that she would use the "Kerrigan" method to finish the assignment we had started in step four. A guided writing activity contingency plan may have been better, as the contingency plan listed would never have worked in this situation. finally, some guided writing may help to build the student's confidence.

--Tracy Alpert

Case 6

A Japanese teacher who had earned her TESOL M.S. at a foreign university returned home eager to try out communicative language teaching with her students. Over the next few months she spent a great deal of time introducing her students to communicative activities and inducing them to participate, and they seemed to be enjoying the new approach and making progress with their English. She was very pleased. As time went on, however, she became more and more conscious of how different her classes were from those of her colleagues, who continued to use grammar-translation techniques. No one ever expressed overt disapproval of what the teacher was doing, but the knowledge that she stood out from her colleagues made her feel more and more uncomfortable. Eventually, she gave up communicative

language teaching and returned to grammar-translation herself.

--based on Flenley, 1985.

Case 7

A visiting teacher from an English speaking country had taught a class of English major in my university for two years. Then, some issues popped up: on the on the one hand, compared to other parallel classes in the department, the students in this class had more difficulty doing grammatical exercises appended at the end of each lesson; on the other, the visiting teacher's knowledge of grammar was limited. Moreover, there was no possibility to change the textbooks only for this class--all parallel classes should use the same textbooks, as a regulation of the department specified. If we changed the textbooks for all the parallel classes in this situation, criticisms and resistance might come from other teachers and classes. In this case, the department asked me to teach grammatical sections for the class, while it still had the visiting teacher to teach other parts of their textbooks.

Those students had been basically trained in a traditional way before they came to the university and had the visiting teacher as their first college teacher who mainly used the communicative approach. Her students gradually got used to the new approach of instruction and began to like it. Because in her class there was less tension. Moreover, she seldom assigned the class any homework. The dilemma I had in this new situation was: I had to follow the syllabus designed for their textbooks

which were more suitable for the traditional teaching, while I [thought I] had to pull the class a little back to the traditional way of instruction if I wanted the class to catch up with other parallel classes in terms of grammar.

However, trying to do this was a frustrating job. First, the class seemed to show no interest in the grammar study; second, they did not like to do any home assignment, either.

--Yang Yong-Lin

CONCLUSION

Situational leadership can scarcely be expected to solve all the problems of introduction of new methodology into conservative educational systems, by any means. It cannot be expected to magically speed the difficult process of changing teachers' knowledge of modern language teaching to actual behavior in the classroom, for example, when there are strong cultural or other inhibitions to educational change. However, these examples illustrate that providing training in situational leadership to teachers can at least supply them with a concrete tool to be used at their option to introduce new methodology to their students effectively. It merits consideration as a means to help them function as innovators.

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Footnotes

[1]Brief solutions to the additional cases appear in Appendix I.

[2]Cases 5 and 7 were written by students in my English 496 TESOL Methods class during the Fall 1990 semester.

APPENDIX I

Additional Cases

Case 3

Task-relevant readiness level of students: R3

Appropriate leadership style: S3

Case 4

Task-relevant readiness level of students: R2

Appropriate leadership style: S2

Case 5

Task-relevant readiness level of students: R1

Appropriate leadership style: S1

Case 6

Task-relevant readiness level of teacher: R3

Appropriate leadership style: S3

Case 7

Task-relevant readiness level of teacher: R3

Appropriate leadership style: S3